

# Library Phones Hacked; Town Owes \$15,000

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

Hackers broke into the library's phone system this spring and racked up calls totaling more than \$15,000 to the Philippines, India and Jordan, selectmen learned this week.

This information came to light during a routine discussion of year-end transfers during Monday's selectmen's meeting. Finance Director John Madden said the library needed to transfer \$13,500 within its accounts to pay for most of the fraudulent calls. The most expensive call was to the Philippines; it lasted for

24 hours and cost \$7,732.

Other notable calls included a 13-hour call to the Philippines that cost \$4,289 and a three-hour call to Jordan for \$884.

Christine Smythe, Department of Public Works office manager, has been working to understand how hackers accessed the library's phone system and to get reimbursement from the phone company, Verizon, which is so far refusing to give the town credit. The Department of Public Works

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DUXBURY FREE LIBRARY

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is responsible for the town's phone system.

Smythe explained that the problem was first discovered in February at the library when calls made to the library's circulation desk were answered by a woman in India. The library's phone company, Cran-Com, learned that one of the library's voice mailboxes had been forwarded to an international number.

However, after fixing that problem and receiving \$333 credit from Verizon, the town learned that the calls continued in late February and March. By May, the library owed over \$15,000 for calls made to India and the Philippines. The library's phone system had been hacked remotely when someone called into a voice mail system from an outside phone and accessed a mailbox. Once inside the mailbox, the phone system had a feature that allowed the remote caller to dial "9" to gain an outside line and call anywhere in the world. Also, the phone line could

then be forwarded, and one was — to India, where a woman answered the calls coming into the circulation desk.

In March, library director Elaine Winquist called Duxbury police to report the fraudulent calls and Smythe contacted Homeland Security, which brought in the FBI. Smythe said she was able to track the phone numbers to certain cities in the countries but was not able to pinpoint who received the calls. She is waiting to hear from the FBI.

The library has since installed a new phone system and switched service companies. All international calls have been blocked and there is limited call forwarding. Smythe said the town will monitor the new system to make sure there are no more breaches.

Smythe believes that someone with a "working knowledge" of the library and its phone system is to blame, because the person would have to know how to access specific voice mailboxes. Or it could be "one incredibly lucky person to have randomly ac-

cessed this phone system," according to Smythe in her memo on the issue.

Now, Smythe is trying to get the town reimbursed for the calls. Verizon told her it won't credit the amount to the town because it is not responsible for the phone system and how it was used even though it was aware of the fraudulent calls and let them continue. It is threatening to shut off the library's phone service if the May bill is not paid. Smythe is also investigating to see the town can recover the money under its insurance.

Selectmen Chairman Jon Witten was outraged at Verizon and wanted Town Counsel Robert Troy to contact the phone company and "sue them for triple damages."

"This is fraud against the people of the Commonwealth," Witten, an attorney, said.

Selectmen voted to approve a \$13,500 transfer among library accounts to pay the bill, but will not send Verizon the money pending the investigation.